DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 256 501 PS 015 115

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TITLE Children's Perceptions of Their Parents: Relationship to Child Adjustment following Divorce.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 41p.; Portions of paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 25-28, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); *Childhood Attitudes; Comparative Analysis; Divorce; Family Relationship; Fathers; *Hostility; *Nuclear Family; *One Parent Family; *Parent Child Relationship; Parents
IDENTIFIERS Social Perception; Visitation

ABSTRACT

A total of 80 children, half from divorced, mother-led households and half from two-parent homes, responded to the Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory and a semantic differential task that measured content and structure of parental perceptions. Children, their mothers, and their primary teachers also completed a measure of the child's behavioral adjustment, and mothers completed a measure of interparental hostility. Results indicated that the content of children's perceptions of their fathers differed for divorced and nondivorced groups and that the children of divorce had less-well-integrated perceptual representations of their parents. Level of interparental hostility appeared to mediate some of the group differences in perceptions and, in the divorced group, amount of visitation with the noncustodial father was related to positive and well-integrated perceptions of father. Positive perceptions of parents on the content dimensions and well-integrated perceptions of parents on the structural dimensions were positively related to ratings of children's social adjustment. References and tables are appended. (Author/RH)

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ED256501

Children's Perceptions of their Parents Relationship to Child Adjustment Following Divorce

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Portions of this paper are to be presented at the Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Toronto, Canada, 1985. Requests for reprints should be sent to the authors at the Department of Psychology, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, 13210.

PS 015115

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Abstract

Eighty children, half from divorced, mother-led households and half from two-parent homes, responded to the Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory and a semantic differential task which measured content and structure of parental perceptions, respectively. Children, their mothers, and their primary teachers also completed a measure of the child's behavioral adjustment, and mothers completed a measure of interparental hostility. The results indicated that the content of children's perceptions of father differed for the divorced and non-divorced groups and that the children of divorce had less-well integrated perceptual representations of their parents. Level of interparental hostility appeared to mediate some of the group differences in perceptions and, in the divorced group, amount of visitation with the noncustodial father was related to positive and well-integrated perceptions of father. Positive perceptions of parents on the content dimensions and well-integrated perceptions of parents on the structural dimensions were positively related to the ratings of children's social adjustment.

Introduction

In the last 10 years there has been growing interest in the role of children's social perceptions in the mediation of children's social interactions (Barenboim, 1981, Feshbach, 1978, Shantz 1983, Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & Brady-Smith, 1977). The theoretical model underlying this research suggests that how a child is influenced by another person's behavior, both in the immediate situation, and over the long term, is partly a function of how this other's behavior gets filtered through his or her social perception processes(Messe', Stollak, Larson, & Michaels, 1979). Social perceptions, in turn, are partly the product of actual environmental stimuli and partly the product of internal affective and cognitive processes and states of the child(Shantz, 1983).

Within this framework some research has focused on how children perceive their parents and on the relationship of these perceptions to the child's social adjustment(Badavas, 1983; Burger, Lamp, & Rogers, 1975; Goldin, 1969; Michaels, Messe' & Stollak, 1983; Serot & Teevan, 1961). In this literature, most attention has been given to perceptions of parenting behavior. Across a variety of populations and ages, a small number of factor-analytically derived content dimensions typically emerge. Schaefer (1965a,b, Margolis & Weintraub, 1977) identified 3 dimensions: Acceptance vs.

Rejection, Psychological Autonomy vs. Psychological Control, and Firm Control vs. Lax Control and these dimensions are very similar to the content dimensions found by other researchers (Goldin, 1969). Children's perceptions of their parents as rejecting and as psychologically controlling have been found to relate to measures of psychological maladjustment such as clinic referrals delinquent behavior and poor self-esteem (Badauas, 1983, Goldin, 1969, Michaels, Messe', & Stollak, 1983).

Much less empirical attention has been given to how children organize or structure their perceptions of their parents than to the content of these perceptions. Personality and developmental theorists have argued that children develop more or less well-integrated internal representations of their parents and others (Mahler, 1972, Selman, 1980, Selman, Jaquette & Lavin, 1977). As with the content dimensions, these too are the product both of actual parent-child interaction and of the child's affective, cognitive, and motivational processes. By well-integrated is usually meant the ability to bring together individual perceptions based on different events and feeling states, into a consistent, overall representation of each parent. Threats to this can come from both external factors, such as the child being exposed to widely differing images of the parent, or from internal factors, such as the child having

conflicted reactions to the parent. Such experiences may lead the child to perceive the parents in a distorted fashion, frequently by focusing only on one aspect of the parent's behavior while disregarding other aspects and, thus, lessening the number of conflicting images. At the level of the individual parent, a distorted representation may involve perceiving the parent as either "all-good" or "all-bad," rather than more realistically as a combination of both positively and negatively evaluated characteristics. In relation to both parents, the distortion may take the form of "splitting" of social perceptions where one parent is imbued with mostly positive attributes or characteristics and the other parent with all the negative characteristics. From this theoretical standpoint, it is the process of perceptual splitting, and not which parent is seen as all good or all bad, that indicates poor integration of social perceptions.

In the present study differences in perceptions of parents in children from divorced and intact families were investigated and the relationship of such differences to the child's social adjustment was explored. The experience of parental divorce should be an area where perceptions of parents may be centrally important (Hetherington, 1979, Kurdek & Siesky, 1980a,b; Kurdek, Blisk, & Siesky, 1981). Much has been written about how the child may be negatively

affected by changes in the mother-child and father-child relationship around the time of a divorce, and the question of what factors facilitate coping and positive adjustment, and what factors lead to psychological and behavior problems in the child, has occupied much research attention (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1979; Hodges & Bloom, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976, 1980). Recent approaches to this question have come to see the child as actively interacting with his parents in an attempt to cope with the trauma of divorce, rather than being a passive recipient of the parents' actions (Kurdek, 1981). It is in this context that the impact of divorce on the content and structure of the child's perceptions of his parents, and the consequent mediating role that these perceptions may have with respect to social behavior and adjustment, may have importance. Both changed behavioral interactions with the parents after divorce, and the increased conflict and ambivalence the child is likely to feel toward his parents, may influence some restructuring of the child's perceptions of both parents, and the stressful environment in which this must be done may be expected to present a challenge to the child's ability to integrate divergent views of mother and father.

The first set of hypotheses focused on group differences in children's perceptions. It was predicted that children of divorce would perceive their parents as

less accepting than children of intact families, and that the greatest difference should occur under conditions of high interparental hostility. Secondly, it was expected that children of divorce would show less well-integrated representations of their mothers and fathers than children of intact families, again with the greatest differences expected to occur under conditions of high interparental hostility. Thirdly, for children of divorce, the extent of visitation with the noncustodial father was expected to be related to perceiving father as more accepting and to forming better integrated perceptual representations of father.

The second group of hypotheses focused on the relationship of these content and structural perception measures to children's social adjustment. With regard to the content dimensions it was expected that children's perceptions of their parents as accepting and as fostering psychological autonomy would be positively related to child adjustment, while perceptions of parents as firm controlling were expected to be related to child adjustment in a curvilinear fashion such that moderate amounts of firm control should be associated with higher levels of adjustment. Finally, at the structural level, less well-integrated representations of the parents and more splitting in social perceptions were expected to be

negatively related to child adjustment.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 40 male and 40 female 6-11 year old children, their mothers, and their primary teachers. Half the boys and girls lived in homes with mothers and fathers who were in their first marriage, while half lived with their divorced or legally-separated mothers, where the legal separation and/or divorce had occurred within the previous 2 1/2 years. Subjects from the divorced/separated group were recruited by telephone after names had been obtained from the county divorce register and through referrals from married and divorced individuals. Subjects from intact families were recruited from written descriptions of the study which were distributed to Brownie groups and other school-related groups, as well as from referrals by other married and divorced individuals. An attempt was made to have an even age distribution across both family structure and child sex.

Instruments . Children's perceptions of their mother and father along the content dimensions of Acceptance vs. Rejection, Psychological Autonomy vs. Psychological Control, and Firm Control vs. Lax Control were assessed with the short-form of the Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, 1965, Burger & Armentrout, 1971). In

the questionnaire the child is presented with a series of 56 discrete parenting behaviors to which he or she must respond "like," "somewhat like" or "not like" mother/father.

The two structural perception variables were assessed with a semantic differential scale developed by Saltz, Dunin-Markiewcz & Rourke (1975). Children are presented with a series of 17 bipolar adjective pairs on a 5-point scale and asked to rate their parents along these. All but the last pair were from the original measure, the scores of which have been found to load highly on an evaluative factor (Saltz et. al., 1975). In this study, an additional pair, "good-bad", was added to the end of the list in order to further highlight the evaluative dimensions of children's perceptions of their parents. First, as an operationalization of splitting of children's parental perception, a measure of Between-Parent Difference in Perception was calculated as the average absolute difference between the score for mother and the scores for father across the 17 adjective pairs. Secondly, as a measure of the degree to which the child brings perceptions of a parent together into an integrated perceptual representation, a measure of Within-Parent Variability in Perception was calculated. This score was the average of the absolute difference of each rating from each child's arithmetic mean for that particular form of the scale (i.e.

mother or father form).

The current level of interparental hostility was assessed with the O'Leary-Porter Scale (OPS) (Porter & O'Leary, 1980) which measures the frequency with which a child views overt indices of interparental conflict such as arguments, sarcasm, or physical violence. While the OPS orginally consisted of 10 scorable items embedded within 10 extraneous items, these authors, as well as subsequent researchers (Hershorn, 1982) have only employed the 10 scorable items. This procedure was also followed in the present study. In the present study, children's membership in either a high or a low interparental hostility group was determined by a median split conducted on their mother's sample-wise OPS scores. A series of chi-square analyses conducted to explore for differences in number of children in each of the eight groups of sex x family structure x interparental hostility following this median split failed to reveal any significant differences ($p < .05$).

Children's behavior adjustment was assessed with the child, parent, and teacher forms of the Behavior Rating Profile (BRP) (Brown & Hammill, 1978). The BRP scales ask the respondents to indicate whether a range of adaptive and nonadaptive behaviors are characteristic of how the child may behave at home, school, or with peers.[1]

In addition, divorced mothers provided information

about the frequency and duration of the child's visitation with the non-custodial father on a background questionnaire and completed a self-concept scale (Monge, 1973) which was not analyzed here. Children also completed a cognitive perspective taking task (Chandler, 1973, Kurdek, 1979) which was not analyzed for the present study.

Procedure

Children and their mothers were tested separately in different rooms within the home. The children first completed the Semantic Differential on either mother or father, followed by the CRPBI on the same parent. They then completed the cognitive perspective taking task, followed by the Semantic Differential and CRPBI on the other parent. Finally, the child completed the 3 child scales of the BRP. All child measures were presented orally. The order of the Semantic Differential and CRPBI for the two parents was counterbalanced across subjects.

Mothers first completed the self-concept scale, followed by the background questionnaire and the parent form of the BRP. Lastly, mothers rated the current level of overt interparental hostility with the OPS. The children's primary teachers were requested to complete the teacher form of the BRP and return it by mail to the investigator.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

An initial set of Pearson product moment correlation analyses were performed to determine whether age of the child, income, mother's and father's education, or number of older siblings, were related to the perception measures, the adjustment measures, or both. Since these variables have sometimes been found to relate to children's adjustment to divorce, they could possibly become confounding factors in any subsequent statistical analyses that examined the relationships among perceptions, adjustment, and the three classification variables (family structure, child sex and interparental hostility).

The results indicated that income, mother and father's education, and number of older siblings were not related to either the perception or adjustment measures. Whereas the child's age has significantly related to adjustment on the Home Scale for children of intact families (r =-.39, p <.05), age was not significantly related to the perception measures and therefore can not be a confounding variable in the relationships between perceptions and adjustment.

Relationship of Children's Perceptions to Family Structure, Interparental Hostility, and Child Sex

The relationship between the 3 classification variables and the parent perception variables were examined by means

of analysis of variance. Means and standard deviations for the perception variables at each level of the classification variables are shown in Table 1.

Acceptance vs. Rejection . For fathers, a significant 3-way interaction was found F (1,72)=5.27, p <.05. Examination of the simple two-way (family structure x sex of child) interactions at each level of interparental hostility revealed that there was a significant family structure x sex of child interaction at the higher level of interparental hostility F (1,33)=5.25, p <.05, but not the low level (F <1.0). While the tests of simple main effects for the high hostility group failed to reveal any significant effects (p <.025) an inspection of the means suggests that within the high interparental hostility group, boys of divorce tended to view their fathers as less accepting than boys of intact families, whereas girls of divorce tended to view their fathers as more accepting than did girls from intact families.

A 2x2x 2 analysis of variance performed on the Acceptance vs. Rejection scores for mother revealed no significant main effects or interactions. However, relevant only to the children of divorce and as predicted, the frequency of visits and duration of visits with the noncustodial father was positively related to children's perceptions of their fathers as accepting (r =.38, p <.05

for frequency of visits and r =.32, p <.05 for duration of visits.)

Insert Table 1 about here

Psychological autonomy vs. Psychological control . For father, results of the ANOVA revealed a 3-way family structure x level of interparental hostility x child sex interaction F (1,72)=4.00, p <.05); a sex of child x level of interparental hostility interaction F (1,72)= 5.23, p <.05 and a main effect for sex of child F (1,72)=7.28, p <.05. Examination of the 3-way interaction allows for the fullest interpretation of these results. Here, an inspection of the simple 2-way (sex of child x level of interparental hostility) interaction at each level of family structure reveals a significant interaction only within the parental divorce group F (1,36)=8.95, p <.005. Examination of the simple main effects reveal that boys tended to view their father as more psychologically controlling than girls only within the low interparental hostility, parental divorce group F (1,20)= 17.67, p <.05).

The ANOVA for mother's Psychological autonomy vs. Psychological control indicated no significant main effects or interactions. In the divorced group, frequency and

duration of visitation with fathers were not related to perceptions of father on the Psychological autonomy vs. Psychological control dimension.

Firm control vs. Lax control . A significant main effect for family structure was found for fathers in the 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA, F (1,72)=17.32, p <.0001. Children of divorce perceived their fathers as less firm controlling than did children from the intact families. There were no significant main effects or interactions in the ANOVA for mothers' Firm control vs. Lax control. Frequency and duration of visitation with the noncustodial father in the divorced group was not related to perceptions of father on this dimension.

Between-parent difference in perceptions . The 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA revealed a significant 3-way interaction, F (1,72)= 4.44 p <.05 and a significant effect for family structure F (1,72)=11.12, p <.005. Analysis of the simple two-way interactions (family structure x sex of child) at low and high levels of interparental hostility revealed only a significant main effect for family structure within the high interparental hostility group, F (1,33)=8.88, p <.01. Within the high interparental hostility group, children of divorce perceived a greater average absolute difference between their parents than children of intact families.

It was further predicted that the parental divorce,

high interparental hostility group would demonstrate the greatest between-parent difference scores of all the groups. Separate a priori contrasts were performed which indicated that, as expected, there was a significantly greater Between-parent absolute difference score in the parental divorce, high interparental hostility group when compared to the intact, low-interparental hostility group, t (76)=2.70, p <.01. Additionally, there was a significantly higher Between-parent absolute differences score in the parental divorce, high interparental hostility group when compared to the intact, high interparental hostility group, t (76)=3.78, p <.01, but no significant difference between the means for the high versus low interparental hostility groups for the children of divorce. Interestingly, when a similar procedure was employed using the average directional between-parent difference score, no significant differences were revealed between the high interparental hostility group and each of the three remaining groups. This suggests that it may be the amount of perceptual splitting rather than its direction (i.e., which parent is viewed positively or negatively) that is most important here.

Finally, for children of divorce, frequency and duration of visitation with father were negatively related to the Between-Parent Absolute Difference score (r =-.5', p <.001 and r =-.37, p <.017 respectively).

Within-parent variability . The 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA for Within-father variability in perceptions revealed a significant main effect for Family Structure, F (1,72)=4.30, p <.05 with children from the divorced homes perceiving their father as possessing more variability in positive and negative characteristics.

For children in the divorced group, duration of visitation with father was significantly negatively related to Within-father variability (r =-.41, p <.01) but frequency of visitation was not related to this perception variable.

Relationship between Children's Perceptions and Child Social Adjustment

The relationship of the content and structural perception variables to the children's social adjustment (BRP scales) was assessed using pooled correlations (across all levels of family structure, interparental hostility, and child sex) after an initial series of tests for homogeneity of correlations done on the simple correlations revealed no significant differences for any perception variables (see Table 2).

Acceptance vs. Rejection . Children's perceptions of mother's acceptance was significantly related to the children's Home Scale (r =.39, p <.001) School Scale (r =.25, p <.05) Peer Scale (r =.27, p <.05), and the Teacher

Scale (r =.26 p <.05). Perceptions of father's acceptance was related only to child adjustment on the Parent Scale (r =.22, p <.05).

Insert Table 2 about here

Psychological autonomy vs. psychological control . Mother's Psychological control was negatively related to child adjustment on the Home Scale (r -.37, p <.001), School Scale (r =-.22, p <.05) and Peer Scale (r =-.28, p <.05). Father's Psychological control was significantly negatively related to the Home Scale (r =-.38, p <.001), School Scale (r =-.24, p <.05) and Peer Scale (r =-.27, p <.05) child ratings, but not the Parent Scale or Teacher Scale.

Firm control vs. Lax control . A curvilinear relationship was expected between children' perceptions of Firm control vs. Lax control and child adjustment. Mother's Firm control was not related to any of the child adjustment scales. Father's Firm control was significantly related only to the Peer Scale (r =-.28, p <.05). Examination of the simple correlations did not show any significant relationships among these variables.

Between parent difference in perceptions . Between-parent difference in perceptions was significantly

negatively related to the Home Scale (r =-.24, p <.05), the Peer Scale (r =-.23, p <.05), and marginally significantly negatively related to the Teacher Scale (r =-.23, p .07).[2] Interestingly, a measure of the directional difference between perceptions of mother and father along the evaluative dimension did not yield significant adjustment correlations. This is consistent with our expectation that what is important is the amount of difference between the parents, rather than which parent is seen postively and which is seen negatively.

Within-parent variability . As predicted, there was a significant curvilinear relationship between the Within-parent variability score for mother and both the Parent Scale (r =-.28, p <.01 and the Teacher Scale (r =-.34, p <.01), but not for the child rating scales[3]. Within parent variability for father was not related in a curvilinear manner to any of the BRP scales. It seemed possible that the father variable might be negatively related to children's adjustment in a linear manner, rather than a curvilinear manner and this was tested with pooled simple correlations. There were significant negative correlations between Within father variability and the Home Scale (r =-.42, p <.01) School Scale (r =-.38, p <.01), and Peer Scale (r =-.28, p <.05). Pooled simple correlations for Within mother variability and child

adjustment yielded only one significant finding, a negative correlation with the child's Home Scale (r =-.27, p <.05).[4] It appears, therefore, that the expected curvilinear relationship between Within-parent Variability and child adjustment may hold for perceptions of mother, but that for fathers a linear association may better explain the relationship between the perception and the adjustment measures. The results also suggest that Within-father variability may be more strongly related to how the child views himself/herself, while Within-mother variability may be more strongly related to how the child's adjustment is viewed by significant others.

Relative Contributions of the Perception and Classification Variables

To assess whether the perception variables contributed to child adjustment above and beyond any contribution made by the 3 classification variables (i.e., family structure, interparental hostility, and child sex) a series of MANCOVAS (for the 3 child scales) and ANCOVAS (for the Parent Scale and Teacher Scale) were performed. The perception scores for mother and father were included in the model as an explanatory variable following the three major classification variables. Significant contributions to the model resulted for the Home and Peer scales for Mother Acceptance vs. Rejection (F (1,71)=12.40, p <.001 for Home

Scale, F (1,71)=4.96, p <.05 for Peer Scale), for mother Psychological autonomy vs. Psychological control (F (1,71)=12.03 p <.001 for Home Scale, F (1,71)=7.62 p <.01 for Peer Scale) and for father Psychological autonomy vs. Psychological control (F (1,72)=13.41, p <.0005 for Home Scale, F (1,71)=5.60, p <.05 for Peer Scale). Both Mother Acceptance and the Between-parent absolute difference score contributed significantly to the Teacher Rating Scale (F (1,64)=4.03, p <.005 and F (1,64)=5.86, p <.05 for Mother Acceptance and Between parent variability respectively).

Relationship between Content and Structural Perception Variables .

Correlation analyses were performed for the total sample in order to determine how the structural and content components of children's perceptions are related.

Lower Between-parent absolute difference scores were related to both mother and father being perceived as Accepting (r=-.22, p .05 for mother and r =-.32 p .01 for fathers). Between-parent absolute difference was higher when mother, but not father was perceived as Psychological controlling (r -.29, p .01 for mothers). However, Between-parent absolute difference was also higher when fathers, but not mothers, were perceived as Lax-controlling (r =.31, p .01). The extent of Within-mother variability in perceptions was significantly negatively related to

perceptions of mothers as accepting ($r=-.22$, $p < .01$) but not to the other two CRPBI dimensions. Within-father variability in perceptions was not related to any of the CRPBI dimensions for fathers. Thus, the relationships between the content variables and the structural variables are higher for the Between-parent absolute difference measure than for the Within-parent variability measure.

Discussion

This study first sought to explore whether children from divorced homes differed from children of intact families in perceptions of their parents along three content dimensions of parenting and in the degree to which they could form well-integrated perceptions of their parents. It then sought to determine whether such differences in perceptions to parents were related to differences in the children's social adjustment as measured by child self-reports, parent reports, and teacher reports of the children's behavior at home, at school, and with peers. The initial set of ANOVAs did find perception differences in children from divorced and intact homes. Interestingly, the two additional classification variables, level of interparental hostility and child sex, both of which have been thought to affect children's adjustment to divorce, also appeared to mediate the majority of the family structure findings for the perception variables.

For the CRPBI content dimensions, the divorce-intact differences were found only for perceptions of father's parenting. Greater differences in perceptions of father than mother might be expected, since it is the relationship with the noncustodial father, that is likely to be the most changed. The influence of a different pattern of father-child interactions seems most clear-cut in the case of the Firm Control findings where it seems likely that noncustodial fathers should have difficulty maintaining everyday involvement in child discipline. However, the findings of a three-way interaction with level of interparental hostility and child sex for the Acceptance vs. Rejection and Psychological Autonomy vs. Psychological Control dimensions appears to require a more complex explanation. Group differences on these variables may involve an interaction between the impact on child perceptions made by actual changes in the father's behavior, and the impact on these perceptions made by psychological processes working within the child as he or she attempts to cope with divorce. Thus, in the Acceptance vs. Rejection dimension we found a pattern in which divorced fathers were perceived as more rejecting by their sons, but more accepting by their daughters when there was a high level of interparental hostility. Previous research has reported the detrimental effect on a child of the pulls for alliance that

may frequently accompany high hostility between the ex-spouses (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This study suggests that at the perceptual level, boys of divorce tend to view their fathers as less accepting than boys of intact families whereas girls of divorce tend to view their fathers as more accepting than girls of intact families. These data also suggest that boys of divorce may have a particular tendency to perceive their fathers as trying to control them psychologically. While it is somewhat unclear why higher perceived Psychological Control in boys of divorce occurred only under the low interparental hostility condition, one possibility is that it is only when interparental hostility is low, that the son perceives his father as turning away from marital control issues and becoming more interested in controlling him psychologically.

Interestingly, there were no differences in the way children of divorce and children of intact families perceived their mothers on the three CRPBI content dimensions. The only group differences in perceptions that also held for mothers was for the Within-Parent Variability measure. It may be that perceptions of mothers remain fairly stable after a divorce, despite the fact that divorce often entails major changes in the availability of the mother to the child, and more generally, in the mother's role in the family.

Support was also found for the expectation of divorce-intact differences in the structural perception variables of Between-parent Difference and Within-parent variability in perceptions with children in the divorce group engaging in more perceptual splitting between the two parents and having less well-integrated representations of their fathers. Again, in the case of Between-parent variability, level of interparental hostility played a mediating role, such that it was only at the high level of interparental hostility that children of divorce engaged in more perceptual splitting than children of intact families. One reason for the divorce-intact differences in Within-parent variability for fathers but not for mothers may have to do with the reduced contact the child has with his or her noncustodial father. This may prevent the child from being able to "work through" and integrate the conflicting representations of father that have either been personally experienced or communicated by others at the time of the divorce. The child's continuous contact with the mother should allow for more opportunity to integrate disparate perceptions of her after the divorce.

In this context, it is interesting to note that both Within parent variability and Between parent difference in perceptions are negatively related to the extent of visitation with their fathers by the children of divorce,

while perceptions of father as accepting increases with visitation. Thus, when children have substantial contact with their fathers, they may have greater opportunity to process their perceptions and to "reality test". This may inhibit the tendency to engage in perceptual splitting and enhance perceptual integration. It is also important to note that there was no relationship between visitation with father and any of the adjustment variables, so that the relationships between perceptions and adjustment that were reported were not merely a reflection of a relationship between contact with father and adjustment.

The study's findings are also strongly supportive of the hypothesized role that these content and structural variables play in children's adjustment. Initial analyses for homogeneity of correlations indicated that the correlations between the perception and adjustment measures were not significantly different for the children in the divorced and intact homes at each level of interparental hostility and for each child sex. Pooled correlations with the child adjustment variables were therefore employed. Children who were better adjusted had more positive perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' parenting (i.e., higher Acceptance and lower Psychological control). Regarding the structural variables they were less likely to engage in perceptual splitting, where one parent was

perceived as having mainly positive characteristics and the other as having mainly negative characteristics. Their perceptions of their mother were more likely to have a moderate amount of variability along the evaluative dimension, i.e. within the general trend to perceive mother positively, the more highly adjusted children were likely to perceive a moderate amount of variability in perceptions of positive and negative characteristics in their mothers.

The results for the Between-Parent Absolute Difference Score and child adjustment are among the most interesting findings in that they support the possibility that perceptual splitting contributes to child adjustment problems. Similar examination of the directional difference score based on the evaluative dimension did not show any significant relationships with child adjustment. This is consistent with our conceptual focus on the organization and integration of children's representations of their parents, which holds that it is the presence of perceptual splitting, and not which parent is seen positively or which parent is seen negatively, that leads to problems in child adjustment.

Since the focus of the study was on adjustment after divorce, we also examined the simple correlations for the total divorce group for each perception measure. In general, the patterns for the divorce group were very similar to the pattern in the pooled correlations and in

fact, in 59% of the cases where a significant pooled correlation was found, the correlation for the divorced group was higher than for the total group.

The important role that both the content and structure of children's perceptions of their parents appears to play in child adjustment was further demonstrated by the series of MANCOVAs and ANCOVAs which sought to determine whether the perception measures contributed to the variance in children's adjustment above and beyond the variance attributable to the three classification variables all of which had in previous research been implicated as affecting child adjustment. This was a very conservative test of the salience of the perceptual variables. The results, which showed that in approximately 50% of the cases the perception variables did contribute to the variance above and beyond the contribution made by the classification variables, supports the strength of these findings. In these MANCOVAS and ANCOVAS it was also possible to examine whether there were any interactions between the perception variables and the three classification variables in explaining child adjustment, and this turned out not to be the case. It therefore appears that children's perceptions of their parents may mediate the impact of divorce, interparental hostility, and child sex in an additive fashion.

Relationships between the perception variables and the

adjustment measures always occurred for a subset of the adjustment measures, rather than for all of these. This is consistent with the findings of most researchers who have used multiple measures of child adjustment (see review by Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1981) and appears to reflect the fact that child adjustment is a multidimensional construct which needs assessment across situations and by different observers. It was in this context that the child, parent, and teacher forms of the BRP were all employed in the present study. Further research with these and other behavioral rating instruments will be necessary before it can be determined specifically why a particular perception measure was related to a particular subset of the adjustment scales.

Finally, the findings of significant relationships between the content and structural perception measures suggests that the content and structure of childrens' perceptions of their parents are related. The direction of these relationships is suggestive of an interpretation that children who view their parents as accepting and non-controlling may find their relationship with their parents less stressful and may therefore not need to resort to perceptual splitting to deal with their conflicting feelings toward their parents.

Footnotes

[1]Seven teachers did not return the Teacher Form of the BRP. Most voiced lack of time as the reason for this and none indicated that their reason had anything to do with the particular child they were asked to rate. Consequently, the statistical analyses involving the school adjustment measures were conducted only on the 73 children for whom there were teacher data.

[2]These were two-tailed tests.

[3]To test the hypothesis of a carvilinear relationship, the pooled squared correlations were calsulated with the linear correlation between Within-parent variability and the children's adjustment measures partialed out.

[4]These were two-tailed tests.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for the CRPBI

Family Structure:	Divorced			
Hostility:	Low		High	
Sex of Child:	M	F	M	F
Mother				
AR				
M	66.17	64.40	64.25	65.10
SD	4.67	10.45	8.99	3.84
AC				
M	31.25	33.20	29.12	30.00
SD	7.01	7.87	5.77	6.31
FL				
M	24.50	21.80	26.25	22.30
SD	5.42	3.49	5.50	4.14
Father				
AR				
M	65.58	60.80	53.75	63.40
SD	8.80	12.66	17.49	8.63
AC				
M	34.25	24.10	28.25	30.90
SD	6.74	3.90	5.87	9.03
FL				
M	26.25	27.40	31.63	26.70
SD	5.51	4.67	3.81	5.03

(table continues)

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for the CRPBI

Family Structure:	Intact				
Hostility:	Low		High		
Sex of Child:	M	F	M	F	Total
Mother					
AR					
M	64.36	64.70	66.22	64.39	64.39
SD	7.35	4.57	4.84	7.47	7.47
AC					
M	33.36	29.00	33.56	31.31	31.31
SD	6.42	7.16	7.20	6.75	6.75
FL					
M	26.18	24.10	23.44	24.34	24.34
SD	6.91	4.48	3.54	5.52	5.52
Father					
AR					
M	64.36	63.10	64.78	56.40	61.81
SD	7.24	6.03	6.87	12.89	10.68
AC					
M	32.64	27.90	32.78	28.90	30.11
SD	6.41	7.37	6.84	5.59	7.09
FL					
M	23.82	23.00	22.89	24.50	25.65
SD	5.13	3.80	3.52	5.44	5.20

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the Perception Variables Derived from the Semantic Differential Measure

Family Structure:	Divorced			
Hostility:	Low		High	
Sex of Child:	M	F	M	F
Mother				
Within-variability				
M	1.02	1.21	1.20	1.19
SD	.44	.26	.22	.48
Father				
Within-variability				
M	.97	1.16	1.[illegible]	1.20
SD	.48	.16	.21	.39
Between-parent absolute difference				
M	1.25	1.54	1.67	1.28
SD	.63	.73	.95	.63

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the Perception Variables Derived from the Semantic Differential Measure

Family Structure:	Intact				
Hostility:	Low		High		
Sex of Child:	M	F	M	F	Total
Mother					
Within-variability					
M	1.06	1.05	.93	1.11	1.09
SD	.44	.23	.24	.31	.35
Father					
Within-variability					
M	.93	.93	.99	.98	1.03
SD	.46	.31	.26	.27	.35
Between-parent absolute difference					
M	1.18	.91	.76	1.00	1.19
SD	.70	.50	.35	.34	.66

Correlations Between BRP Scales and Children's Perceptions of Parents

	Home	Student School	Peer	Parent	Teacher
Mother					
CRPBI					
AR	.39**	.25*	.27*	.19	.26*
AC	-.37**	-.22*	-.28*	-.18	-.13
FL	.22	.03	.18	.08	-.05
SD					
Within-variability+	-.06	.01	-.08	-.28**	-.34***
Father					
CRPBI					
AR	.02	.08	.18	.22*	.12
AC	-.38**	-.24*	-.27*	-.13	-.04
FL*	.02	-.02	-.28*	.01	.06
SD					
Within-variability+	.02	-.15	-.16	-.12	.05
Between-parent absolute difference	-.24*	-.18	-.23*	-.13	-.23*

* $p < .05$, one-tailed. ** $p < .001$, one-tailed.

+ These are squared partial correlations employed to test the hypothesis of a curvilinear relationship

Note. SD refers to semantic differential measure.

Df = 72, except for Teacher Rating Scale where df = 65.